



Coordinate to Innovate A Question of Balance

A crucial element in developing the institutional capacity to manage shocks and emergencies is the institutional capacity to coordinate actors so that they can interact and innovate.

Livestock sectors are complex at the best of times. During droughts and outbreaks of diseases that affect both people and animals, large numbers of actors become involved. These include governments at local and national level, regional and international bodies, non-governmental and civil society organizations, faith groups, the private sector, the media and local communities. Effective coordination of the activities of such a broad and diverse group of actors would be a challenge in any circumstance, let alone in the face of a rapidly deteriorating situation, such as a drought or a disease outbreak in a remote part of the country.

Coordination or control?

Studies of recent drought and livestock disease outbreaks in the Horn of Africa have demonstrated coordination approaches at both ends of the spectrum: a 'free-for-all' in which different actors work largely in isolation, oblivious of the actions of others, with the obvious dangers of duplication of effort on the one hand and failure to address important tasks and geographical areas on the other; and 'coordination paralysis' on the other - endless rounds of meetings, assessments, verification exercises and more meetings at multiple levels which delay vital responses. Whilst one would expect that such confusion would be particularly rife when actors from different sectors are involved, the situation is often even worse among different government agencies - medical and veterinary departments, specialist emergency response units which are often housed in the office of the president or equivalent, and even the police and army.

Failure to learn from previous episodes perpetuates the situation. If any contingency plans are available these are generally based on a menu of technical options, leading to a directionless operationalisation of short-term technical interventions. Increasingly, experience shows that the impact of a given response depends as much on the approach and institutional arrangements used as the correct choice of technology. Worse still, in the absence of guidance, governments are inclined to make rash decisions: wary of media criticism for failure to act, for example, there is a tendency to do something - anything - irrespective of whether it is effective or





high priority. Distribution of mosquito nets during a recent Rift Valley fever outbreak in Kenya is an example of this: whilst this certainly did no harm, and was a tangible response that the media could easily cover, it is very unlikely to have had any impact on the course of the Rift Valley fever epidemic.

Weaving a network fabric

As a companion policy brief in this series has argued, extreme weather events - especially droughts but also floods - can no longer be treated as emergencies: it is the new norm in the pastoralist areas of the Horn. To cope with this situation, instead of lurching from emergency response to emergency response, a new approach is required; one that builds long-term capacity of all the actors to respond to a diverse range of shocks. Coordination of sector activity is an integral part of the passage to such a new rural development paradigm.

In cases where rapid, coherent action ensues or where newly formed coalitions of actors allow new practices and approaches to flourish, this is often a result of third-party brokering, rather than sector-wide coordination. Whilst such third-party negotiation is often necessary and vital, it is in most cases not enough to establish sufficient sector-wide coordination, trust and social capital or changed ways of working.

Sector coordination, however, involves more than just the brokering of the necessary linkages or the elimination of obstructions and similar task - now commonly described as innovation brokering. It also provides a leadership function to a network of actors as it confronts particular issues. It thus requires actors that command the sector's broad trust, the institutional and organisational overview, and the ability to bring layers together. In examples where this has functioned well, such tasks have

either been fulfilled by a body set up specifically through the concerted actions of a critical mass of sector actors, or where such tasks have gravitated organically towards a broadly recognised sector champion.

A question of trust

Sector coordination has been shown to be a vital element of increasing innovation response capacity. Trust is key for effective coordination, as, once this has been built, it is possible to apportion different roles and responsibilities - avoiding, for example, costly verification exercises to check assessments made by other parts of government, civil society, or international organizations. Clear allocation of tasks and responsibilities also allows actors' roles to evolve and enables the acquisition of relevant competencies and skills. Sector coordination has to be an integral part of the response to the new reality, in which drought and other shocks are the rule rather than the exception. Key to this will be the well-organized networking of different players; promoting sharing of lessons and experiences, planning, negotiating roles and responsibilities, and which, crucially, allows an environment of trust to develop. Such an approach will enable the right action to be taken, by the right actors, at the right time.

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